

# Yummy New Raisins

## From Our Vineyard to Your Table

Horticulturist David W. Ramming evaluates Selma Pete raisin grapes before harvest.

PEGGY GREB (K10110-1)

Some of your favorite treats for those long, leisurely breakfasts and festive dinners of the year-end holidays might be made with plump, juicy raisins. Sweet and chewy, raisins add flavor and texture to traditional favorites like iced cinnamon rolls, raisin-and-lemon filled vanilla cookies, crisp apple-raisin turnovers, warmed bread pudding, or buttered rum raisin sauce spooned over vanilla ice cream.

Raisins also make a perfect accent for creative cuisine such as a chilled salad of chicken, carrots, and pine nuts; a raisin-mustard-nut relish to accompany roast pork or other meats; or cheese, raisin, and pecan-filled chile rellenos.

In the United States, most of the raisins bought for making these dishes, or for simply eating as a convenient and healthful snack, are grown in central California's San Joaquin Valley. In fact, these vineyards yield more than half of the world's raisins. Now, scientists at the ARS San Joaquin Valley Agricultural Sciences Center have developed two new kinds of appetizing raisins for growing in this region.

ARS horticulturist David W. Ramming and technician Ronald E. Tarailo at Parlier—where the center is headquartered—bred the new Selma Pete and Diamond Muscat raisin grapes.

Vines of Selma Pete produce impressive quantities of seedless grapes, which are then dried to form good-sized raisins. What's more, Selma Pete raisins can dry on the vine after the canes that bear the grapes are cut. This feature makes them ideal for mechanical harvesting and thus cuts costs. Ramming named Selma Pete after longtime collaborator L. Peter Christensen, who is now retired from the University of California's Cooperative Extension Service.

Selma Pete raisins ripen early and thus are ready to harvest sooner than many other kinds of grapes. Earliness is a boon for

growers, Ramming points out, because "it reduces the chance that the crop could be damaged by unseasonably early rains in the fall."

Earliness is also a prized trait of Diamond Muscat, so named because "it's a jewel of a grape," he notes. With its rich, fruity, muscat-flavor, this grape provides an important alternative to

Muscat of Alexandria, the muscat most commonly used to make dessert wines or confections such as chocolate-covered raisins. Diamond Muscat is seedless. That's a key advantage over Muscat of Alexandria, which has to be mechanically deseeded—resulting in sticky, damaged raisins.

Ramming and Tarailo recently made Diamond Muscat and Selma Pete available to growers and nurseries. This came after a decade of research during which they inspected more than 400 experimental vines of each variety and sampled some of the 24,000 pounds of fresh raisins from these vines. Both raisin grapes are descendants of parent vines developed in the early 1900s by USDA scientists in California.

Besides being fun to eat, raisins are good for you: they are fat free and cholesterol free, and provide fiber, potassium, and iron.—By **Marcia Wood**, ARS.

*This research is part of Plant, Microbial, and Insect Genetic Resources, Genomics, and Genetic Improvement, an ARS National Program (#301) described on the World Wide Web at <http://www.nps.ars.usda.gov>.*

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PEGGY GREB (K10109-1)



Selma Pete raisin grapes before and after drying on the vine.